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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to involve people in study circles in discussing and taking action on community changes caused by immigration. A foreword introduces immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities and defines study circles. Session 1 gives individuals the opportunity to share their personal experiences, stories, and views and sets the tone for open, respectful discussion in future sessions. Session 2 considers the issue of how immigration changes the community from various views. Session 3 considers the issue of how immigration changes the economic life of the community, again from various views. Session 4A provides several views about what direction a community's policies could take with regard to immigration and community change. Session 4B deals with meeting with Congressional representatives or senators, participants in other study circles in the community, or possibly state and local government officials. It offers a means of strengthening cooperation throughout the community and from different levels of government. Each session provides questions or views as starting points for discussion. Session 5 contains a list of action examples for how an individual might make a difference on immigration-related issues, including actions one might take as an individual, action projects that small groups of people can undertake, and actions that the whole community can take. Guidelines for study circle participants conclude the guide. (YLB)

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Changing Faces, Changing Communities

Immigration & race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities

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A guide for public dialogue and problem solving

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Changing Faces, Changing Communities

Immigration
&
race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities

STUDY CIRCLES
RESOURCE CENTER

The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out this mission by helping communities organize study circles – small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions. Contact SCRC for information on topical issue guides, "how-to" publications, and organizing and networking assistance. Organizers of large-scale programs receive free materials and assistance.

CONGRESSIONAL EXCHANGE

The mission of Congressional Exchange (CX), a sister organization of SCRC, is to provide new ways of bringing citizens and Members of Congress together in direct, deliberative dialogue about the nation's most important public challenges. Housed in Washington, DC, CX provides technical assistance and publications for individuals and organizations who are working to promote study circle dialogue between citizens and their Congressional representatives.

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Foreword – Why should we talk about immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities?

In 1992, the civil unrest in Los Angeles captured the attention of the nation. It made many people wonder whether communities which are multiethnic and constantly changing could ever find ways to work together.

Soon after the violence, a team of researchers from the National Civic League brought some Los Angeles residents together in focus groups to explore ways to prevent civil disturbances from ever happening again. What the researchers found was a very complicated, multiethnic picture.

Together, these Angelenos talked about conflicts and hostility between whites, African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, and also *within* all of these ethnic groups. They also talked about tensions surrounding language differences, overcrowded schools, and the competition for jobs. Issues relating to immigration emerged in some of the discussions. It was clear that the arrival of recent immigrants (some of whom were in the groups) was a factor in many of these tensions; it was also clear that the arrival of newcomers had brought great economic and cultural benefits as well.

The researchers found a remarkably similar set of suggestions coming from all the different groups they talked to. Across the board, people expressed the need for:

- safe, neutral settings in which they could have genuine dialogue with people from other ethnic backgrounds;
- opportunities to dispel stereotypes;
- opportunities to make a difference and work with others on many issues of common concern; and
- ways to be heard by public officials and other community leaders.

Though Los Angeles may be unusual in its diversity and complexity, it also provides a glimpse of the future for many American communities. In fact, almost every American community is becoming a more complicated place, and one of the factors driving these changes is the arrival of people from other countries. For many of us, immigration is not just a distant national issue, but a daily reality.

The purpose of this guide is to involve people in study circles to talk about and take action on these community changes. It is designed to provide exactly the kind of opportunities envisioned by the people in Los Angeles: honest, constructive dialogue which will lead not only to local action and community building but also to changes in policy.

What are study circles?

A study circle is a democratic, highly participatory discussion group of 10-15 people. A study circle is facilitated by a person who is there not to act as an expert on the issue, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused and helping the group consider a variety of views. The facilitator and the discussion materials help the group find areas of common ground and develop ideas for action.

Study circles have their greatest impact when organizations across a community work together to create large-scale study circle programs. These community-wide programs engage large numbers of citizens – in some cases thousands – in study circles on a public issue such as race relations, crime and violence, or education. As citizens participate in community-wide study circle programs, they form new multiethnic networks; gain a deeper understanding of others' perspectives and concerns; discover common ground; and gain a greater desire and ability to take action – as individuals, as members of small groups, as members of large organizations in the community, and as voters.

Study circles on community change

Talking about immigration can be difficult because it calls into question who "we" are in the first place – how many people, and which people, should be allowed to join the community? It is important for us to deal with that question, and provide considered

judgments and new ideas to policy makers. Session 4A in this guide provides several views about what direction our policies could take.

In most places, however, the community aspects of immigration are more pressing than national policy questions. No matter how the rate of immigration may change in the future, communities are now facing the challenges and opportunities presented by the newcomers who have already arrived. We need to decide what to do about language differences, bias crimes against immigrants, multiculturalism in the school curriculum, the competition for jobs, and the ways in which immigration affects existing racial and ethnic tensions.

This guide is designed to help you deal with these issues. Sessions 1, 2, and 3 deal with the community aspects of immigration. They are intended to help you talk about how immigration-related issues touch our daily lives, and how they affect our communities. Session 5 contains a list of action examples for how you might make a difference on these issues, including actions you might take as an individual, action projects that small groups of people can undertake, and actions that the whole community can take.

Study circle assistance is available

We at the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) want to hear from you. We can assist you with your study circle program and put you in touch with others who are organizing similar programs. We also want to learn from you so that we can more fully document the ways in which communities are using public dialogue to meet one of the most important challenges our society faces. Contact SCRC at (860) 928-2616, fax (860) 928-3713, or <scrc@neca.com>. You can also find study circle materials and information on the Civic Practices Network web-site at www.cpn.org.

If you are interested in inviting public officials – such as a city council person, state legislator, or Member of Congress – to join your study circle, we can help you think about how to make the most of the dialogue. If you are particularly interested in working with your U.S. Congressional Representative or Senator, SCRC's "sister organization," the Congressional Exchange, can provide more information and assistance. Congressional Exchange can be reached at (202) 393-1441, fax (202) 626-4978, or <congex@congex.org>.

Session 1 – Who are we? The many faces of our community

The communities we live in are increasingly complex places. When you ask people from different parts of the community what they think about immigration, they give you many different answers. Some people argue that it is impossible to have a meaningful discussion about immigration without understanding ethnicity and racism. Others are more concerned about the effects of immigration on their job, their place of work, and the economic health of the community. Still others talk about their experiences at school or in their neighborhoods.

It is important for us to examine the different reactions that are present in the community. Regardless of how long we've been here or how we got here, we aren't just observers of the changes that affect our communities – we are part of those changes. Before we try to understand the changes and decide what to do about them, it is important for us to listen to each other's perceptions and concerns.

The purpose of this session is to give you the opportunity to share your personal experiences, stories, and views. It will also set the tone for open, respectful discussion in the sessions to come.

The following questions provide starting points for the discussion:

1. Introduce and describe yourself to the group.
   - Why have you described yourself the way that you have? In what ways are the group members' descriptions alike or different? What do you make of these similarities and differences?
   - In what ways have your upbringing, experiences, or thinking influenced your description?
   - Might you vary your response in different situations or company? Why or why not?

2. How have others described you?
   - Do the ways others describe you match the ways you think about yourself, or are their descriptions different from your own?
   - Historian John Kuo Wei Tchen says:
     People always ask me where I'm from. If they're Chinese, I need to tell them that I'm from JiangXi Province. If they're American, it's not enough to tell them I'm from Wisconsin. I have to tell them that my parents came from China. I was born in General Hospital the year after my family arrived in this country, and I'm the first American citizen in the family.
     What does this statement mean to you?
3. How have things changed in the last five years?
   - How is the mix of people living near you changing?
   - How well do people get along? How is that changing?
   - What other kinds of changes – in race relations, in the economy, in our cultural life – do you see?
4. How do these changes affect you in the different parts of your life – at work? in church? at home? in school?
5. How have your background and experiences contributed to your opinions about these changes?
6. In what ways do your attitudes about these issues differ from those of your parents?
7. How often do you talk to people who are recent immigrants, or who come from cultural backgrounds which are different from your own? What is that like?
8. How do language differences in the community affect you?

Cases for discussion

Read over the cases listed below and choose a few to discuss.

1) An African-American man who has lived in this country all his life loses his job. He hears a radio advertisement announcing a new job placement program. He calls for information and finds out the program is dedicated to finding jobs for recent immigrants.

2) A man from a Central American country brings his family to the U.S. illegally to escape the fighting there. He is threatened with depor-

tation; he argues with the authorities, stating that the U.S. is at least partly responsible for the war in his native country.

3) An African-American woman notices that some of her co-workers are more likely to give her a hard time when she wears braids in her hair and dresses in African fashions.

4) A white mother worries about the quality of the education her kids are receiving. They are being taught in overcrowded classrooms. Many of the other students are recent immigrants and demand much of the teacher's time.

5) An Asian American man sitting on a bus is asked by another passenger whether he speaks English. The man responds that he was born in Michigan and has lived in this country all his life.

6) An undocumented immigrant takes a job as a domestic. After several weeks of work, her employer refuses to pay her. She is afraid to go to the police because she doesn't want to be deported.

7) A woman looking for a job feels frustrated because all the job announcements request applicants who are bilingual, and she speaks English only.

As you read the cases, think about these questions:

1. What is your first response to each of these cases?
2. Do you have any cases to share? Talk about something that has happened to you or a member of your family. Why is it an important case for you? Is it an example of a common experience in your community?
3. What, if anything, do you think the people described in each of the cases should do?
4. What, if anything, do you think organizations – such as businesses, churches, and community groups – should do?
5. What, if anything, do you think the government should do in these cases?

8) A Caucasian man who has worked for years to build a successful business in the community notices new government-funded business loan programs for women, people of color, and recent immigrants. He is angry because he was never given this kind of assistance.

9) A young mother who is a legal resident, but not a citizen, realizes that she will be losing her food stamps and supplemental security in-

come (SSI) because of the new welfare reform laws. She doesn't know how she'll support her three children.

10) When the U.S. soccer team plays a Latin American team on U.S. soil, the majority of the crowd often roots for the Latin American team.

11) An Arab American college student is detained and his bags are carefully searched every time he enters an airport.

Session 2 – How is our community changing?

You often hear people say, "We are living in a rapidly changing world." One of the reasons these changes seem so overpowering is that we are caught up in them. We aren't just observers of change in our communities, we are part of those changes.

The arrival of newcomers has obviously had a great impact on the way our communities have changed. In fact, over the years, immigration has been an important part of change in our country as a whole.

How is our community changing now? How can we use our understanding of these changes to build a better community? Each of the following views is written in the voice of a person who holds the view. Use these views as a starting point for your discussion and for developing your own views about this question.

View 1 – Racial stereotyping and prejudice are on the rise.

Racism has always been a major force in the community. New immigration makes it even harder to deal with. People continue to make judgments about other people solely on the basis of the color of their skin. Immigrants from Europe are accepted much more easily in the community than immigrants from Latin American, African, Asian, or Caribbean countries. At the same time, many people assume that a person who is Latino or Asian must be a recent immigrant, even though in many cases, their families have lived here for generations. Finally, many newcomers also bring their own prejudices with them, carrying on conflicts with other ethnic and social groups from their native lands. We need to bring these elements of race and racism out into the open so we can deal with them.

View 2 – Our schools are struggling to keep up with the challenges of immigration and diversity.

Educating young people is a tough job as it is. It is even tougher to educate people who were born in other countries, aren't used to

their new community, and may not know English. This is especially true in urban school districts, which often have fewer resources and usually have a larger share of students who are recent immigrants. Our schools have always been the place where young newcomers learned about our country and our culture. Over the years, our schoolchildren have become a more diverse group, representing many different languages, different countries of origin, and different ethnicities. The changes result in even greater challenges for the schools. If we are going to continue to ask schools to face greater challenges, we need to find ways to help them do it.

View 3 – We've stopped trying to keep our common culture.

Americans in every community used to uphold a core set of values and ideals. Every schoolchild learned the Pledge of Allegiance, sang the "Star-Spangled Banner," and read "The Gettysburg Address." Even though we still go through the motions, people don't seem to care much about what it means to be an American anymore. One of the biggest reasons is the influx of new people from other countries, who bring with them their own books, songs, and traditions, not to mention their own languages and political beliefs. Schools and adult education classes seem to mirror this trend, spending more time on multiculturalism than on civics and American history. It doesn't even seem as if we're living in the same country anymore. There are certain ideals that make us Americans, and we need to hold on to them.

As you read the views, think about these questions:

1. Of the views, is there one (or a combination) that best fits your ideas, and why? Are there other ideas you would like to add?
2. Think about a view you don't agree with. What would lead a reasonable person to agree with that view?
3. What experiences and beliefs have helped form your ideas?
4. As you listen to others, what new insights and ideas do you gain?

View 4 – Language differences are preventing us from communicating.

It is difficult to do things as simple as shopping, talking to your neighbor, or taking a taxicab if the people you meet don't speak the same language as you do. At the very least, language differences are inconvenient. At the most, they prevent us from feeling like we are members of the same community, or even the same country. These days, the growing number of people who don't speak English has made the problem even bigger. There are now entire sectors of the community where people never speak English and don't see any reason to learn. By printing official information in other languages, many businesses and government agencies now seem to assume that many people either can't or don't need to speak English. To get along and to work together, we need to be able to communicate.

View 5 – New cultures and traditions are making the community more interesting.

One of the reasons that our communities are interesting places is that many different kinds of people live in them. This has always been true. Each new group of people coming to the community brings a whole new culture – a rich array of music, dance, foods, languages, dress, traditions, learning, and ways of thinking. These additions have a tremendous, positive impact on the community, making our culture more diverse and exciting. People shouldn't be forced to give up their customs just so they can be like other Americans. Instead, we should celebrate the different cultures around us.

View 6 – Racial inequities are being reinforced through immigration.

As our communities get more diverse, they also seem to be getting more unfair. Racism is one of America's oldest problems, and it is both more subtle and more troublesome than ever. When newcomers arrive, they see people of color being portrayed on television as criminals and drug addicts. Newcomers also encounter this kind of institutional racism in everything from the way business loans are distributed to where grocery stores are located. African-Americans in

particular have been hurt by this; when a new immigrant group is successful in a community, whites use that success to ask why African-Americans can't succeed. To make a multiracial, multiethnic community work, we need to address racist practices head-on.

View 7 – The immigrants arriving now are coming for different reasons.

There has been a change recently in the reasons why people come to this country. The more recent newcomers seem to be more interested in financial gain than in becoming Americans. They may want the benefits of U.S. citizenship, but they'd rather be separate from the community than part of it. Many of them plan to return to their native countries eventually. When people are primarily interested in making money and maintaining the cultures and traditions they brought with them, we end up with communities which have no common bonds. We need to insist that newcomers who want to become citizens also want to become Americans.

Session 3 – How is the economic life of our community changing?

Being able to earn a living is a primary concern for almost everyone. No matter whether you have come to the community recently or have lived here for years, job opportunities and job security are very important.

The 'economic life' of most communities is changing rapidly, and in many different ways. How are those changes taking place? How can we use our understanding of these changes to build a better economy? Each of the following views is written in the voice of a person who holds the view. Use these views as a starting point for your discussion and for developing your own views about this question.

View 1 – There is more competition for fewer jobs.

Most people want jobs that will allow them to earn a decent wage, support their families, and feel secure about the future. It doesn't seem like there are as many of those jobs as there used to be. The requirements for many jobs – education, skills, experience – keep getting higher and higher. Some of the jobs are also being shifted overseas. For still other jobs, the wages keep falling as people agree to work for less and less. Jobs in janitorial, construction, and service industries are being filled by immigrants willing to work for lower wages. With every newcomer who arrives in the community, the odds of getting a decent job go down. It is hard to divide the economic "pie" among more and more people when there isn't enough to go around as it is.

View 2 – Some people are trapped in jobs without good wages or good opportunities.

There is an entire sector of the population which is living on the edge, working at menial, dead-end jobs in the garment, hotel, meatpacking, and other industries. Many of these workers are recent immigrants, with limited skills and low literacy, and many of the jobs require hard physical labor in dangerous work environments. Racism also plays a role; if the immigrants were white rather than predomi-

nantly people of color, there would be far less acceptance of this situation. Some employers take advantage of immigrants who entered this country illegally, denying them basic working rights and subjecting them to environmental hazards. These employers know that undocumented immigrants will not call in the authorities because they fear being deported.

View 3 – We have a better quality workforce, top to bottom.

Over the years, the arrival of immigrants has enriched our workforce and benefited the local economy as a whole. Many newcomers bring new skills and expertise; even immigrants with relatively low skills bring with them an eagerness for hard work and a will to succeed. The competition created by this ever-increasing labor pool pays great dividends, since it makes companies more efficient and productive. Many of the people who come to this country find themselves at the bottom of the economic ladder, but through hard work and long hours they succeed in making a better life for themselves. Many immigrants have created new businesses, which in turn creates new jobs in the community. As rich and poor alike strive for a better life, our individual efforts improve the workforce and benefit all of us.

As you read the views, think about these questions:

1. Of the views, is there one (or a combination) that best fits your ideas, and why? Are there other ideas you would like to add?
2. Think about a view you don't agree with. What would lead a reasonable person to agree with that view?
3. What experiences and beliefs have helped form your ideas?
4. As you listen to others, what new insights and ideas do you gain?

View 4 – It is harder to achieve the 'American Dream.'

The 'American Dream' of turning hard work into prosperity and success still means a great deal, both to newcomers and to people whose families have lived here for decades. The problem is that in an increasingly complex economy, basic job skills are no longer enough.

Almost all the professions – such as law, medicine, engineering – require many years of expensive postgraduate education. Blue-collar jobs are changing even more rapidly, becoming more reliant on high-tech skills. These days almost everyone needs to be able to use a computer. People who came to this country generations ago didn't have to face this problem. Many of today's immigrants lack the education or the high-tech skills they need to achieve the American dream.

View 5 – There are new multinational, multicultural opportunities.

We are living in an increasingly global economy. As communities rely more and more on international trade, the diverse communities are the ones which have the advantage. Having a multilingual workforce is a great benefit to many industries. Cities with strong ties to other parts of the world are often best suited to develop products and trading partnerships which enable them to reach foreign markets. The multicultural appeal of these cities also makes them attractive to tourists. Many new companies have been established by recent immigrants themselves. In this way, the arrival of newcomers from abroad slowly builds up a city's economic assets.

View 6 – There is a much greater burden on our social services.

Our social 'safety net' is becoming more and more strained. One of the reasons is that new immigrants bring new costs to their communities. Newcomers who are poor, unaccustomed to our culture, and unable to speak English place a great burden on our schools and social service systems. The 1996 changes in the welfare laws limited immigrants' access to these services, but political refugees are still eligible for welfare programs, English as a Second Language classes, and subsidized housing. Meanwhile, the cuts also affect native-born people who really need benefits. People who are already here end up making sacrifices to fund the programs that newcomers need.

Session 4A – What should we do about immigration and community change?

Each one of us – except descendants of Native Americans – is here because a relative came to this country from another land, whether voluntarily or by force. Furthermore, no matter where we are from or how long we have been here, each one of us has an interest in the question of how many people, and which people, should be allowed to settle in the United States. Perhaps most important of all, each one of us – as individuals and as members of our communities – has a role to play in deciding how we can best address the challenges and opportunities that accompany immigration and community change.

In the fall of 1997, the United States Commission on Immigration issued a report calling for fundamental changes in the nation's approach to immigration. For many people, the report merely highlighted something many had long been aware of – that immigration affects *everyone* in some way. Immigration has an impact on our schools, on jobs and the economy, on racial and ethnic relations. It even creates questions about some of our most basic civil liberties.

Some of the most recent and widely felt changes in immigration policy are connected to the U.S. Congress' decision to deny legal immigrants access to federally funded public assistance programs such as food stamps, welfare, and Medicaid. In turn, many local social welfare agencies are re-examining how they can provide an adequate safety net for the residents of their communities. If we are due for still more changes in national policy on immigration, informed public input should be a part of the national debate.

Moreover, in sections of the country where relatively large numbers of immigrants continue to settle, people are questioning how to respond to the tremendous changes their communities are going through. How, for example, do we make sure that good jobs, adequate housing, and a quality education will be available for both longtime

residents and newcomers? How can we make immigrants feel welcome without sacrificing the quality of life that others in the community are striving for? In many instances, these and other similar questions are not matters to be decided by public policy, but by the actions that we take as individuals and community members.

Here are some of the main approaches now being discussed:

Approach 1 – We should uphold the United States as a place where people can come to achieve a better life.

Immigration has been good for the United States, creating jobs and a stronger economy, providing cultural diversity, and filling our nation with optimism and creativity. Allowing immigrants to settle here reinforces American pride and strength.

Americans also take pride in our country's tradition of opening its doors to oppressed and downtrodden people who ask only for a chance to improve their lives. Nevertheless, the U.S. has often made decisions about who should be allowed to come here based on factors other than the protection of human rights. Now that the Cold War is over, one of our first priorities should be to offer asylum to people who face persecution and economic hardship in their native countries, no matter where they come from.

Unfortunately, our current immigration policies create too many roadblocks making it difficult for immigrants to participate fully in American life. Furthermore, our attempts to regulate immigration too often violate the basic civil liberties of both native-born U.S. citizens and immigrants.

Whether or not someone immigrates to the United States through legal channels, once they are here we should protect their rights and do whatever we can to assist them in adapting to their new life. We must make sure that everyone gets fair treatment when it comes to housing, jobs, and educational opportunities.

What might be done under Approach #1: Policies and Actions

- Increase the number of people each year who are given visas to immigrate to the United States.

- Create stiffer penalties for discrimination of all kinds, in areas such as housing, employment, and education. Increase the number of federal investigators charged with enforcing anti-discrimination laws.
- Overturn recent changes to the laws that limit immigrant access to public assistance such as food stamps, welfare, Medicaid, and Supplementary Security Income (SSI).
- Streamline and simplify the process for achieving legal residency and citizenship, so that fewer resident aliens go "underground" due to confusion and fear of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) procedures.
- Make sure that enforcement of immigration laws does not violate people's civil liberties, especially their right to due process.
- Broaden the INS definition of political persecution so that more immigrants will be able to qualify for asylum.
- Organize programs to create dialogue on race and inter-ethnic relations, in order to build bonds of understanding and trust between people who come from many different backgrounds.
- Support greater public funding of educational and social service programs designed to ease immigrants' transition to life in the U.S.
- Intensify our commitment to foreign language instruction in the schools, so that native-born citizens learn to communicate better with people from other countries.
- Support school curricula which emphasize multiculturalism, in order both to expose young people to the variety of cultures around them, and to create a more welcoming environment for newcomers.
- Expand English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Volunteer to teach English to immigrants of all ages.
- Create services such as job training, job placement, and housing advice for recent immigrants.

Approach 2 – Creating good jobs and strengthening the economy should be our first priority.

Our current immigration policies provide many businesses with a large pool of low-cost workers. But these policies also make it difficult for America's poor and working class – especially the poorest segments of the African-American community – to get ahead. Moreover, these policies seem foolish given the government's most recent push to move people off welfare.

This doesn't necessarily mean that we should reduce the number of immigrants. It does suggest, however, that we should take a closer look at whom we are allowing in and why. Our current immigration policy focuses mainly on reunifying families rather than creating more and better jobs. This means that the poorest segments of our native-born population often lose "entry level" jobs to large numbers of new immigrants in industries such as hotels and restaurants, janitorial services, textile and garment manufacturing, and hospitals.

We simply aren't doing enough to take advantage of the economic benefits that can come from immigration. We would stand a better chance of making the economy stronger if we concentrated on bringing in greater numbers of skilled workers, instead of allowing large numbers of poorly educated, low-skilled workers to settle here. In addition, we should be doing more to strengthen the connections that immigrants bring to markets in Latin America, Asia, and other parts of the world.

What might be done under Approach #2: Policies and Actions

- Replace the family reunification policy with one that gives preference to admitting highly educated and skilled workers from other countries.
- Make job education and training more available for *everyone*, not just immigrants.
- Encourage workers with specific, needed skills to immigrate to the United States.

- Support the growth of unions so that people are better able to obtain and keep jobs that provide a decent wage.
- Enforce existing labor laws to punish employers who exploit immigrants, thereby improving the working conditions and raising the wages of all American workers.
- Provide education and training for those immigrants – such as asylees and refugees – who come here with relatively little education and few marketable job skills.
- Create programs that provide small business and microenterprise loans to new entrepreneurs.

Approach 3 – We must put the interests of U.S. citizens ahead of those of immigrants.

It isn't fair to the people who are already living in the U.S. to allow everyone who wants a better life to move here. So many people have immigrated to the U.S. in recent years that many of our communities are overwhelmed by the need to provide decent housing, health care, and education for both immigrants and native-born residents. And while newcomers may bring more tax dollars into the federal government, local communities are usually left stuck with the bill – often in the form of higher property taxes – to pay for these services.

Having to meet the needs of immigrants makes it more difficult to help America's poorest citizens improve their lives, especially people of color. For example, educational opportunities for our children are threatened when schools are overcrowded with newcomers.

Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for immigrants to assimilate into the cultural and political mainstream of America when we make it too easy for newcomers to get along without learning English. When we don't speak the same language, we split our communities into many isolated groups.

While we must be constant in our efforts to guard U.S. borders, we should also support policies that discourage people from wanting to come here in the first place. For example, the guarantee of generous

"safety net" social services may encourage some people to come to the United States in search of a free ride.

What might be done under Approach #3: Policies and Actions

- Reduce the number of people legally allowed to immigrate to the U.S. each year, keeping some allowances for hardship cases.
- Return extra federal tax money to the local areas that are bearing the greatest burden of resettling newcomers, especially for strained school and health care systems.
- Enforce stricter housing codes to make sure that family homes aren't being converted into overcrowded boarding houses. This will help prevent overcrowded schools and ease the strain on other public services, such as garbage collection.
- Maintain recent changes in the laws that limit immigrant access to public assistance such as food stamps, welfare, Medicaid, and Supplementary Security Income (SSI).
- Allow communities with high unemployment resulting from large numbers of recent immigrants to extend the period of time that people are eligible for welfare.
- Increase funding for the INS so that it can better enforce the immigration laws and improve security at our nation's borders.
- Enforce recent changes in laws requiring citizens who wish to bring in family members from other countries to assume full legal and financial responsibility for them.
- Amend the Constitution so that babies born in the U.S. to people who entered the country illegally may not automatically become citizens. This will discourage some people from entering the country illegally.
- Give every citizen and legal resident a national employment identity card. That way, employers who hire immigrants without legal status to work here can be held accountable for their actions.

- Print official documents and teach young people in English only, thereby encouraging immigrants to fit in more quickly into the political, economic, and cultural mainstream of American life.

Approach 4 – We should do more to improve conditions in neighboring countries.

Working to help improve conditions in countries facing economic and political hardships provides the most practical long-term answer to slowing illegal immigration from those countries. The U.S. spends very little to help other countries. In 1995, the U.S. spent .15% of its federal budget on foreign aid, while Canada and Denmark put aside .43 % and 1.03 %, respectively, of their national budgets to assist the world's poorest nations.

We should do everything we can to help change conditions such as weak economies, civil war, overpopulation, poor health, and environmental pollution. This aid should not be in the form of "quick fix" handouts, but in programs that build a foundation for long-term self-sufficiency, thereby lessening foreigners' desire to settle in the U.S.

Meanwhile, we have a moral obligation to accept immigrants who are fleeing wars or repressive governments that were supported or financed by the U.S. If American foreign policy causes people to flee their homelands, the least we can do is provide refuge to the victims of our foreign policy objectives. Likewise, when U.S. businesses bankrupt their competitors in less developed countries, we should offer compensation.

What might be done under Approach #4: Policies and Actions

- Expand foreign aid and trade benefits for Mexico, the Caribbean, and other struggling areas of the Western Hemisphere. This will help governments strengthen their economies and reduce the flow of immigration to the United States.
- Encourage other developed countries to join with the U.S. in serious and sustained efforts to strengthen the long-term economic development of the world's poorest nations.

- Do away with immigration policies that encourage a "brain drain" of the most educated, highly skilled workers from poorer, developing countries.
- Businesses should pay better wages to workers they hire in other countries.
- Use "sister city" programs to lend technical assistance to developing countries.
- Boycott products made in foreign countries by workers whose employers refuse to provide them with fair and safe working conditions.
- Volunteer for programs such as the Peace Corps or "loaned executives" initiatives to help individuals, businesses, and communities develop the skills they need to compete in the world economy.
- Create programs that provide small business and microenterprise loans to new entrepreneurs in developing countries.
- Encourage businesses with branches in developing countries to reinvest greater portions of their profits in the host country. They need to do more than simply provide jobs for foreign workers.
- Encourage U.S. businesses with branches in foreign countries to hire native workers for management positions, instead of simply filling those jobs with Americans. This will help other countries develop the technical know-how and managerial expertise needed to create good jobs and develop strong economies.
- Require American-owned multinational corporations to abide by U.S. environmental protection standards, even when they are doing business in foreign nations.

Questions to Consider

1. Which of the four approaches comes closest to your views about what we should do?
2. Current immigration policy accepts new immigrants based on the following three criteria: (1) family reunification, (2) attracting

well-trained and educated workers who can help the U.S. economy, and (3) protection for people fleeing social, political, and religious persecution. Which of these three reasons do you think is most important? Which is the least important? Can you think of any other factors we should take into consideration when deciding who should be allowed entry to the U.S.?

3. What, if anything, does the U.S. owe people from other lands who live under threat of social, political, and religious persecution? What about people in other countries who are living in extreme poverty?
4. What, if anything, do we owe immigrants who enter this country legally but who are not citizens? Should they, for example, be eligible to receive the full range of social services such as social security, Medicaid, welfare, and food stamps?
5. Should the U.S. deny citizenship to American-born children of people who entered this country illegally?
6. Should certain types of family connections be given preference when deciding who can immigrate to the U.S.? For example, should the "nuclear family" (spouses and children) of lawful permanent residents take precedence over the "extended family" (siblings and adult married children) of U.S. citizens?
7. What changes, if any, should be made in local and state-level public policy to help both immigrants and their host communities cope with the challenges created by the arrival of new immigrants?
8. Are laws and regulations the best way to deal with these situations? What might we do as individuals or as part of community efforts to address these challenges?
9. What can each of us do – without waiting for government to step in – to help newly arrived immigrants make the transition to American life?

If you are planning to meet with public officials – Getting ready for the next session

Many study circles find it useful to meet with their elected representatives and other public officials to explore further the variety of viewpoints, policies, and actions surrounding issues of immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities. The purpose of such meetings is to expand the circle of discussion so that public officials can also benefit from the same sort of respectful, free exchange of ideas that everyday people experience in study circles.

Questions to prepare for a study circle dialogue with public officials:

1. What are our hopes and concerns for the community when it comes to immigration?
2. What are the most promising strategies?
3. What questions or doubts do we have about these strategies?
4. What role can government play in helping our community realize our hopes and address our concerns about immigration?
5. What questions do we have for the public official(s) we'll be meeting with? Why are these questions important?

Session 4B – Meeting with public officials

In this session, you'll come together with your Congressional Representative and/or Senator, participants in other study circles in your community, and possibly state and local government officials. Your discussions to this point have probably made it clear that addressing the challenges and opportunities related to immigration will require cooperation from throughout your community and from different levels of government. This session offers a means for strengthening that cooperation, and grounding it in a genuine understanding of how others in your community and in government see the issues and the possibilities for action.

The questions and the amount of time noted for each part of the discussion are suggestions – tools you can use to guide yourselves in conversation.

Preparing to meet with public officials (30 minutes)

Especially if your study circle is part of a community-wide effort, you may want to take some time to prepare for your meeting with public officials so that you know what to expect and are better able to reflect the views of the whole community.

1. Review the ground rules that are suggested for this session. While these are similar to the ground rules that you have been using to guide your study circles, they also address some of the particular concerns that citizens and officeholders have about meeting together. Make changes to the list as you see fit.
2. Review what you discussed in earlier sessions by addressing the "focus questions" that will guide your discussion with public officials.

Ground rules

- Everyone keeps an open mind.
- Even if we disagree, we must treat one another with respect.

- There are no lectures or "selling" of pre-set opinions from either citizens or public officials – this is a give-and-take conversation.
- Both public officials and citizens have the freedom to explore all sides of an issue – no one has to have an instant answer for everything.
- Citizens do not use the occasion to talk about personal complaints.
- Everyone is willing to explain why she or he holds certain views and beliefs.
- The news media are allowed to observe only if this is agreed to by both citizens and officeholders. Comments made during this discussion are off the record.

Talking with public officials (60-75 minutes)

As you begin your conversation with the public officials, you might review the ground rules again and give the officeholders an opportunity to add to the list. Then, in order to "break the ice," you might ask two or three citizens to talk about what they've discussed in their study circles so far. Keeping these comments brief and centered on the "focus questions" will help keep the atmosphere conversational and the discussion on-track.

Focus questions

1. What are our hopes and concerns for the community when it comes to immigration?
2. What strategies seem promising to address our concerns?
3. What questions or doubts do we have about these strategies?
4. What role can government play in helping our community realize our hopes and address our concerns about immigration?
5. What questions do we have for the public official? Why is it important for us to sort these questions out?

Next, open the discussion to everyone, asking public officials and citizens to ask questions and engage

each other in dialogue. Use the focus questions to help guide your conversation.

C. Wrapping up the discussion (15-30 minutes)

As a way of closing the session, you might ask participants to reflect on what they took away from the conversation. Make sure that both public officials and citizens get a chance to say what they think.

Getting ready for the next session

During this session, you may have gained a clearer sense of how to address the challenges and opportunities related to immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities in your community. Between now and the next meeting, you might reflect on what you learned in this discussion and give some serious thought to what, if anything, you are willing to do as individuals and with others to move toward the kind of future you want for your community.

Session 5 – Moving from words to action: What can we do in our community?

As communities attempt to address issues of immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities, they are finding that everyone needs to be involved. Meeting the challenges and responding to the opportunities that come with an increase in newcomers to our community is a task that is well worth taking on.

Coming together to learn from each other and develop our ideas about immigration and other related issues in our communities is a critical form of action. Finding ways to continue this dialogue and to include more members of the community is a valuable next step. Study circles often lead to action groups where some of the participants implement the ideas they developed during their study circle.

Working on the issues that face us

Read over the suggestions for action found below under "Moving to next steps," and then select a few of the following questions for discussion. There are more questions here than you will have time to address. Choose a few that you think will be most interesting to your group.

1. What have you heard and learned during these discussions that has surprised you? What will have the largest impact on your attitudes? ... On your actions in the community?
2. What did you take away from your conversations with public officials? What new questions or concerns did those conversations raise that you would like to address?
3. What are the channels of communication between the various ethnic and racial groups in the community? How might those be improved?

4. What can we do as individuals to make a difference on these issues?
5. What efforts are already going on in the community to address these issues? What organizations – businesses, civic organizations, nonprofits – are involved in meeting the challenges and responding to the opportunities involved in community change? What other organizations might help and how can we approach them?
6. How have communities similar to ours effectively addressed challenges like the ones we face? How can we learn more about their efforts? How can we use what we learn?
7. What are the strengths of our community? What assets have gone untapped? How can we put those assets to work?
8. What steps do we want to take? What kinds of support or help do we need to take those steps?

Moving to next steps

What next steps can we take to make a difference? Of the various ideas listed in this session, which seem the most promising? What groups and individuals, inside the community or outside, might support us as we act on our ideas?

1. What can I do as an individual?

- Take leadership. You don't have to be an elected official or a well-known civic leader to be effective. Approach top community leaders and encourage them to foster public dialogue. At the same time, begin dialogues in your own neighborhood as a way to reach out beyond the group you belong to. Your initial work to bring people together will give you the experience and skills for a larger role in the community.
- Get involved in citizenship drives to help immigrants, even long-time residents, go through the formal process of naturalization.
- Read about different cultures and traditions. Start out with your own and branch out to include others.

- Volunteer to teach new immigrants how to speak or read English.
- Be an informed voter. Find out about your local and federal representatives. Are the people in your community well-represented?

  After participating in study circles, one group in New Jersey focused their efforts on local school board elections.

- Write or call your Congressional representatives and other public officials to let them know how you feel about changes in immigration policy.
- Educate immigrants about their basic rights: a minimum wage; a safe work environment; fair housing; and freedom from domestic abuse.

  In Howard County, Maryland, the Foreign-Born Information and Referral Network was founded to help immigrants adjust to American life, learn English, file for citizenship, find jobs, and enroll their children in school. It also sponsors workshops on citizenship and immigration law.

- Ask yourself some basic questions. Do you know and associate with people from different backgrounds? Why or why not?
- Resist attributing actions or characteristics to a person's race or ethnicity. Keep an eye out for ways we use race and ethnicity as a shortcut explanation of things that happen in everyday life.
- Volunteer for programs such as the Peace Corps or "loaned executives" initiatives to help individuals, businesses, and communities develop the skills they need to compete in the world economy.

2. What can we do in our neighborhoods?

- Welcome new neighbors, and seek out opportunities to meet newcomers in the community. Reach out, especially if they are people from a different background than yours.
- Organize events that bring different neighborhoods together, such as sports tournaments or lunches featuring foods of the different groups represented in the community.

In Miami, Florida, city commissioner Willie Gort organized domino tournaments between the neighborhoods of Little Havana and the predominantly African-American Black Grove. The tournaments go beyond just playing dominos to fostering broader community and inter-cultural exchange.

- Establish an English as a Second Language (ESL) class for neighbors.
- Our communities' children will grow up in a diverse world. How can we prepare them to work with people from different backgrounds? Here are some suggestions:

  (a) Encourage local merchants to offer toys and books that reflect and respect differences among people.

  (b) Avoid stereotyping; teach children to be concerned with the content of a person's character.

  (c) When groups mark special occasions or celebrate holidays, find out what the celebration is about. What do Yom Kippur, Kwanzaa, Easter, and Ramadan mean to the people that observe them? Talk to your children about the meanings of different holidays.
- Work across racial and ethnic divisions to identify and combat a common community problem.

  In Los Angeles, California, All Peoples Christian Center worked with the Newton Street police station to develop a neighborhood watch group, consisting largely of recent immigrants, to deal with crime and reduce the influence of gangs.

  In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a city-sponsored youth group formed a Teen Advisory Group (TAG) to recruit Hmong and white students to work together on community projects identified by the students.

  In Hartford, Connecticut, a youth leadership program called Common Ground, brings together area high school students for leadership training and community service. The program gives youth an opportunity to learn how people from varying racial and

ethnic backgrounds can work together to address common concerns.

3. What can we do in our community?

- If there are ongoing tensions between groups in a community, leaders from these groups can form an alliance to discuss ways of working together.

  In New York City, African American and Korean American leaders worked together to create the "Black/Korean Mediation Project."

  In Miami, Florida, the Hispanic Affairs Advisory Board sponsors discussions between members of the Cuban and Puerto Rican communities.

- Congregations from different faiths or different communities and backgrounds can hold joint services, or work together on community problems.

- Start a community arts project. Use the arts and media as a way for people to express themselves and their own cultural identities. Community arts projects can take many forms: photo-text exhibits; video and audio "speak outs"; murals and other pieces of public art.

  This year Springfield, Ohio, held a "Culture Festival" to highlight and celebrate local ethnic cultures. The event featured bands, local artisans, various acts and many vendors.

  In Lima, Ohio, three different congregations got together to do a community production of "Godspell."

- Improve communication between parents, teachers and school officials to help ease the transition for young people who have recently immigrated.

  In Fairfax County, Virginia, Annandale High School will employ three parent liaisons who are fluent in Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese, in addition to their ESL staff, to act as translators and

help explain the basic facts of school life to non-English speaking parents. A school psychologist is also available if problems arise.

In response to concerns expressed by Hmong parents in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a youth coalition established a parental support network to provide counseling and assistance on parenting skills to immigrant parents.

The Washington, DC, public school district created a special "newcomer school," Bell MultiCultural High School, that helps ease the transition of immigrant youths into their new life in the United States.

- Join the local PTA or PTO and be involved in community schools.

In San Antonio, Texas, a first grade teacher worked with neighborhood mothers in immigrant communities to form Avancé, a community-based early childhood development program that sponsors parenting workshops, family support centers with on-site nurseries, and skills development classes for adults. Today the program is used throughout Texas and Avancé kids boast a 90% high school graduation rate, with half going on to college.

- Create homeless shelters that provide counseling and address the particular needs and fears of undocumented workers, who, in addition to suffering from poverty, also face the fear of prosecution and deportation.
- Organize community-wide citizenship drives to ensure that everyone who wants to become a citizen knows where they can turn for assistance.
- Create services such as job training, job placement, and housing advice targeted to the needs of both recent immigrants and other people in the community who need them.

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the city worked with a local community college and local businesses to establish a minority internship program that recruited and trained minorities to intern for positions in local businesses and in city government.

In Massachusetts, The United Electric Control Corporation launched an in-house training program, geared to the needs of its non-English speaking work force, in which employees were given time off from work to attend English language classes.

- Start a "sister city" program to exchange ideas and visits with a city in a developing country.
- Create programs that provide small business and microenterprise loans to new entrepreneurs.
- Develop community-wide cultural workshops for local officials and public service providers to increase understanding of cultural differences.

The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association and the Eau Claire, Wisconsin Coalition for Youth have sponsored community workshops for teachers, law enforcement personnel, and community service agencies on Hmong culture and history. The workshops are conducted by local Hmong citizens

Over 200 members of the police department in Lansing, Michigan have participated in study circles organized by the Lansing Coalition for Community Concerns. The program has been a critical step in dealing with race relations within the police department and between the police and community members.

- Find ways to engage young people in study circles. Fostering constructive dialogue among our youth is an important step to realizing the goals we have for our community and our nation. (Contact SCRC for a copy of *Youth Issues, Youth Voices)*

In Tallahassee, Florida, The Public Agenda project organized "Teen Speak Out Forums" where community teenagers came to deal with a variety of difficult issues – including race relations, affirmative action, cultural differences, myths and misconceptions about race.

Guidelines for study circle participants

The goal of a study circle is to deepen understanding an judgment, and to think about ways to make a difference on an issue you care about. This can occur in a safe, focused discussion when people exchange views freely and consider a variety of views. The process – democratic discussion among equals – is as important as the content.

The following points are intended to help you make the most of your study circle experience.

- Make an effort to attend all meetings. The comfort level and depth of the conversation depend upon familiarity with other participants.
- Think together about what you want to get out of the discussion.
- Help keep the discussion on track.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.
- Listen carefully to others. Try to understand what they are saying and respond to it, especially when their ideas are different from yours.
- Be open to changing your mind.
- When disagreement occurs, don't personalize it. Search for the common concerns beneath the surface.
- Don't waste time arguing about points of fact. For the time being, you may need to disagree and then move on.
- Value one another's experiences. Think about how your experiences have contributed to your thinking.
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully, and ask clarifying questions.